

# Lessons in Climate Diplomacy: We Need Hope and Trust

By: Emirates Diplomatic Academy's diplomat trainee delegation to the 2018 UN Climate Change Conference

Over the past few years, the international community's attention to the issue of climate change has increased significantly. Although the negative consequences keep getting more pronounced, the growth of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide shows no signs of stopping. In this situation, it is easy to get pessimistic and cynical about any prospects of success in fighting the challenge.

Yet, it is precisely now that we need to focus on accelerating the progress made so far. We need to foster an attitude of hope and trust in our ability to achieve results faster. The future of the planet is not all gloomy and dark for many reasons and we, who aspire to being future UAE diplomats, have every reason to believe so.

We, six trainee diplomats at the Emirates Diplomatic Academy, had the opportunity to attend the UN climate change negotiations in Poland just a few months ago, as part of the official United Arab Emirates delegation.

As part of our training, we were assigned to follow the different areas of negotiations that are taking place between 196 governments in this massive process. These included tracking finance provided to developing countries and agreeing on common reporting criteria for emission reduction targets, among others.

Often the important outcomes from these annual conferences are lost to the public because they are so technically complex and full of jargon. However, it is imperative that we find ways to highlight the positive outcomes of such an important process.

In the conference in Poland, also known as COP 24, the agreement on a 'Paris Agreement Rulebook' was seen as a big positive step in the right direction since it gives a standardised way for countries to take action against climate change and keep track of progress.

Another positive aspect we observed was the focus on the gender aspects of climate change. Gender balance has always been of importance to the UAE, and seeing this issue also on the agenda of the UN climate change convention was heartening.

To date, countries have made progress on this agenda through implementing a global *Gender Action Plan*, which aims to promote a gender perspective to the issue of climate change. In Poland, there were various events and activities that supported this aim by raising awareness about gender-responsive climate policies and showcased women's leadership in climate action.

A further achievement was the progress made in issues related to agriculture and food security in climate action. Discussions at COP 24 helped move forward a three-year

workplan that will build knowledge on reducing emissions from agriculture and building resilience to climate shocks in food production.

Food security is rising on the UAE's domestic agenda, demonstrated by a dedicated minister and National Food Security Strategy for the year 2051. As the impacts of climate change worsen, this issue will be gaining even more recognition on both the international and national stages, and cooperation among countries will be key to ensuring sustainable food security for everyone.

There are also reasons for hope here, at home. Being part of the UAE's delegation to a UN climate change conference enabled us to appreciate the role that our country is playing on the international stage in this area. The UAE's financial support to renewable energy globally is well-known: aid delivered to developing countries in this area is approaching a cumulative US\$1 billion.

The UAE's support to global cooperation through providing platforms for major UN climate meetings is less-known. During the latest World Economic Forum summit in Switzerland, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced that, in June 2019, the UAE will host the preparatory session for his September 2019 UN Climate Summit. This will be an important political moment as the UN seeks to motivate states to step up action together.

We should celebrate what our country is doing in support of the cause and, at the same time, encourage it to do more, as all countries should.

Finally, observing the multilateral negotiations on climate change also taught us about the importance of trust. One of the most important factors of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change is trust; the idea that the knowledge that all countries are contributing to tackling this major challenge will encourage and empower everyone to do more.

If hope and trust are the key ingredients in climate change diplomacy, they can also pave the way forward in our countries and individual lives. In the UAE, our leadership realises that young people have a vital role to play in climate action because they are the future and the ones who will bear the burden of the increased deterioration of our planet - this is also why the UAE's climate negotiations delegations always include a sizable youth component.

While we need governments to act on climate change, at the same time it is vital to understand that, as global citizens, we too must take action to reduce our individual emissions. Empowering youth to advocate for a change in local lifestyles to suit a more sustainable world can happen in many ways. Education is key to fighting ignorance and lack of urgency, and schools have an important task in this regard. At the same time, we all individually share the responsibility to help amplify the message of hope and trust in our ability to overcome the challenge of climate change. And then to do what is needed.

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